



Blueprint: developing improved lines of communication

Welcome to the first installment of a newsletter produced by the City of San Antonio to provide information on topics related to development services.

Our goal is to make your job smoother when interacting with our departments. Readers will learn more about the development process and issues and

trends in development and real estate. This will include items on proposed changes and amendments to trade codes, information on board meetings, and development services statistics. While this issue is devoted mainly to Building Inspections, future issues will contain valuable information from other City departments such as Planning, Public Works,

Health, and Fire. Other issues will carry articles by the San Antonio Water System and City Public Service and even organizations such as the San Antonio Real Estate Council and Greater San Antonio Builders Association.

We hope you'll find this newsletter useful and informative and we welcome your comments and suggestions.

Using technology to build for the 21st Century

This is the first part in a series highlighting the City's technological investment in development services departments.

Significant time and resources have been invested in technical enhancements to improve the City's customer service delivery and provide easier and more timely access to information. The City is in full throttle, planning and implementing technological strategies to further enhance and improve the development process and customer service.

In 1999, a three percent technology fee was assessed on all permits issued by the Building Inspections Department. The proceeds of this fee (completely returned to the customer in the form of technological improvements) are enabling all development services departments to deliver customer service in a more efficient, timely and accessible manner. These enhancements are part of an overall process to improve the

City's development services.

Earlier this summer, Building Inspections began issuing individual laptop computers to all of its field and senior inspectors who enforce the various trade and environmental codes and ordinances. The computers make it possible to obtain up-to-the-minute information on inspection requests and permits as well as to map calls for service by address. But the most important feature of the computers is the ability to input inspection results on the jobsite, making it possible for immediate retrieval by the public via the department's website or automated telephone



Laptop computers allow building inspectors to retrieve and send information from the field.

See Technology Page 3



2

Planning to remodel or add on?

3

Asbestos survey now required

4

Just say "Nine is fine"

October
1999



Q & A: Planning to remodel or add on to your home?

Unclear about City regulations regarding these projects? Building Inspections Assistant Director Michael Clack answers a list of the most common questions asked regarding home remodeling projects:

Q: Are permits required?

A: Yes. Depending on the nature of your remodeling project or home addition, it may require four separate permits. The building permit generally covers the construction of the structure (i.e., slab, framing, roofing, sheet rock, doors). Each trade has a separate permit issued for the work performed (i.e., plumbing, electrical and mechanical).

Q: Can I secure my own permit?

A: Yes. Some permits may be secured by the homeowner. They are listed below and briefly describe any limitations:

- ✂ A building permit may be secured by the homeowner to build the project.
- ✂ A plumbing permit may be secured by the homeowner if he/she resides in the residence and it is his/her homestead. Additionally, the homeowner signs an affidavit stating that he/she will perform the work himself/herself.
- ✂ A mechanical permit carries the same requirements as the plumbing permit.
- ✂ An electrical permit may only be issued to a City-licensed master electrician.

Q: Why do I need a permit?

A: Permits in general protect the homeowner by ensuring the project will be built in compliance with the various codes. These codes exist as the minimum construction standards for the safety and welfare of the occupants.

Q: How long is permit good for?

A: Permits expire 180 days after issuance if construction has

not started or has been stopped and abandoned for the same period. Permits are required to be posted on the job site.

Q: How do I know if my contractor is licensed?

A: All four building trades (building, electric, plumbing and mechanical) require the company name to be permanently displayed on their vehicle. The name of the company should match the name shown on the permit. You may call the license clerk at the Building Inspections Department at 207-8235 for more specific information.

Q: What benefits do I get for having a permit?

A: Each permit is entitled to inspections during the course of construction to ensure compliance with the applicable codes. Most contractors will admit that they welcome a second review of their work to ensure they did not miss or overlook anything. If you hire licensed contractors to perform the work and secure permits, various regulations require them to be insured for your protection.

Q: When do I call for inspections?

A: In general, inspections are called for before covering over any work performed. For example, a slab plumbing rough-in inspection is called for before the fill is added for the slab. A slab rough-in is also called to inspect the steel before the concrete is poured. A wall rough-in is called for the plumbing, electrical and mechanical before the insulation or sheet rock is installed.

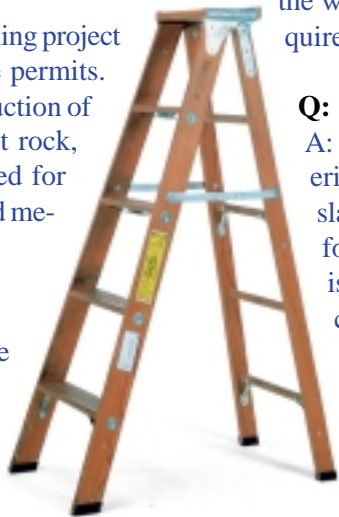
Q: Who do I call for inspections and how long does it take?

A: The inspection request line is 207-8250. There are dispatchers at this number that enter your inspection request and any special instructions, such as lock-box combinations. Generally, any inspection called in is completed by the end of the following business day.

Q: Who can I call for additional information?

A: Listed below are the phone numbers for any additional questions or needed services:

✂ Inspection request line	207-8250
✂ Automated permit/inspection request line	207-8211
✂ Contractor licensing	207-8235
✂ Chief Building Inspector	207-8314
✂ Chief Plumbing Inspector	207-8279
✂ Chief Mechanical Inspector	207-8242
✂ Chief Electrical Inspector	207-8286
✂ General questions	207-8201



Asbestos surveys now a requirement for permits on commercial structures

The Building Inspections Department recently began to enforce an ordinance requiring that an asbestos survey be performed prior to the issuance of a permit for demolition, renovation, alteration, and/or remodeling of any commercial structure in San Antonio.

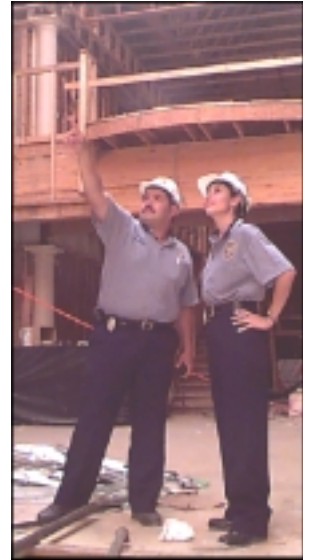
City Council approved the asbestos ordinance last May. The new requirements mirror the Texas Asbestos Health Protection Rules (TAHPR). These rules have been in effect for several years and are enforced by the Texas Department of Health (TDH).

The ordinance requires that the asbestos survey be performed by a TDH licensed asbestos inspector prior to application for a building or demolition permit. A copy of the survey report including the inspector's TDH license number must be submitted with the permit application. Single-family dwellings and residential structures with four or less units are exempt from this requirement. However, projects involving the demolition of more than one residential structure, as defined by TAHPR, shall require an

asbestos survey.

A listing of agencies employing licensed asbestos inspectors can be found in the yellow pages under "Asbestos". A copy of the TAHPR can be requested by calling (800) 572-5548 ext. 2481.

Questions regarding building permit application requirements can be directed to the Building Inspections Department at 207-8248. Questions about the new asbestos ordinance or asbestos surveys may be posed to the Environmental Services Division of the Public Works Department at **207-8987**. *Greg Hammer, Environmental Protection Program Manager, Public Works*



Asbestos surveys now are required before commercial building permits are issued.

Technology from Page 1

line. Inspection requests made by noon will be completed 99 percent of the time by the end of the next business day.

The website contains many useful connections for developers. Perhaps the most useful links for Building Inspections customers are the Plan Review Status and the Permit and Inspections Inquiry Systems. By clicking the Plan Review Status System and typing the plan number, customers can check the status of a set of plans. Pointing to the Permit and Inspections Inquiry System, customers can access permit and inspections information. This includes a list of all the inspections performed for that permit; or permits issued during any time period; or by entering an address, a customer can see a history of the permits that have been issued.

In addition to the website, customers can dial an automated telephone response system at 207-8211 and get permit and inspection information. By en-

tering a permit number, callers can find out what permits have been issued and what inspections have been performed. While the system is completely automated, there is an option for callers to speak with customer service personnel. Also planned is expanding the system to include a plan review inquiry system to allow callers to obtain the same information currently available on the website.

The City's continued investment in a broad Geographic Information System (GIS) will make available standardize mapping and land information systems currently in place not only in the development services departments, but throughout City government. The new map overlay system will be used by departments in the plan review process and will be available to the public for viewing and inquiry as well. Additionally, the City

plans to hire a GIS director to administer all of the City's improvements in this area. *Kevin Burton, Management Analyst, Building Inspections*

www.ci.sat.tx.us/bldginsp

Check Building Inspections' website for helpful links to the following:

- ☞ a listing of licensed contractors
- ☞ Landscape and tree preservation ordinance information
- ☞ garage and yard sale permit information
- ☞ board agendas for the following boards:

- ▶ Building & Fire Code of Appeals
- ▶ Home Improvement Advisory Board
- ▶ Board of Adjustment
- ▶ Mechanical Appeals & Advisory Board
- ▶ Electrical Examining & Supervisory Board
- ☞ Service center hours and locations



9 is fine

**One-stop counter saves time,
improves customer service**

If you are a development services customer, the next time you're on one of the elevators of the Municipal Plaza Building and are unsure where you need to go, simply say to your fellow rider, "Nine is fine".

The City has created a new one-stop counter on the ninth floor of the Municipal Plaza Building, located at 114 W. Commerce, in an effort to alleviate confusion and enhance customer service.

The counter will serve as a clearinghouse of information related to development services as well as offer several services in a new, expanded and customer-oriented area as you step off the elevator. The counter will offer enhanced customer service, eliminating the need

for a large segment of customers to visit multiple floors in the Municipal Plaza Building.

Currently, the Planning Department operates a counter on the fourth floor that provides services such as zoning information and applications. Additionally, the Public Works Department maintains a counter on the eighth floor that receives traffic impact analyses and drainage engineering studies. Information on those services will be available on the ninth floor counter to assist customers. The one-stop counter will be staffed with customer service personnel to provide information regarding platting, zoning, traffic impact analysis, drainage, historic preservation, development rights, permits, licenses, construction trade code regulations and addressing.

Also at the new service counter, there will be a plans examiner stationed to perform over-the-counter plan review for minor remodeling and additions, provide

instantaneous approvals and eliminate the need for such plans to be routed through the regular review process. Plan submittal for all other types of projects will still occur at the tenth floor counter. However, waiting time on the tenth floor will be shorter because of the reduction in the number of customers visiting the floor with minor remodeling and addition plans.

The ninth floor counter also will be equipped with computers with mapping software and a graphic printer which will provide on-the-spot maps and information.

This counter represents one more way the City's development services departments are going that extra mile to accommodate our customers and improve the delivery of services. So remember, next time your in Municipal Plaza and you have a question related to development, just say, "Nine is Fine".
*Kevin Burton, Management Analyst,
Building Inspections*

BLUEPRINT

**City of San Antonio
Building Inspections Department
114 W. Commerce
P.O. Box 839966
San Antonio, Texas 78283-3966**

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED